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MODERN TIMES

The

Emptiness in the Air



Françoise Sagan

Hugh Munro H. E. Bates

overcrowded tenement during the

depression years. The father is

a fighter and a drinker but, save

in his cups, no brawler; and

despite his loss of status as the

breadwinner since he went on the

dole, he is determined that

poverty shall not annihilate his

The newspapers which, in "No

Mean City," were spread on the

coupling on are, in this house-

hold, read; and the great barrier 🛮

Irish Catholics winnowed away to

Catholic sweetheart to be

accepted by his family as, at the

book's end, he leaves to join

One hears the occasional

bleak note of social bitterness-

but I'm glad that Mr. Munro

TINALLY, an intriguing psycho-

Soames was born in a coma and

remained in suspended animation

for thirty years before a bril-

liant brain operation gave him

consciousness. The problem fac-

ing the psychiatrists in "The

Mind of Mr. Soames" is: how

do you "educate" a fully de-

veloped mind with a high I.Q. and

all the physiological needs and

responses of a grown man, with-

the obvious threat of a com-

Mr. Maine works out his

dilemma faultlessly, managing to

say a great deal more about the

basic springs of human behaviour

than many a more "conventional" novelist. A pity he felt

obliged to squeeze in a woman's

magazine sub-plot, but it can be skipped with ease.

pletely uninhibited adult?

logical crossword puzzle

the s.f. fringe. John

level, as good as they come.

children's future.

H.M.S. Hood.

WONDERFUL CLOUDS. By Françoise Sagan. Translated by Anne Green. (John Murray. 10s. 6d.) THE DAY OF THE TORTOISE, By H. E. Bates. (Michael Joseph.

THE CLYDESIDERS. By Hugh Munro. (Macdonald. 16s.) THE MIND OF MR. SOAMES. By Charles Eric Maine. (Hodder & Stoughton, 15s.)

by Jeremy Brooks

TILLE SAGAN'S new novel, Wonderful Clouds," finds] osée (from " Those Without Shadows ") in the third year of her marriage to a handsome, virile American, Alan. Because they are rich, and without any sense of a world outside their own emotions, they have nothing to do but laze and drink on the beaches of Key Largo, an island off the coast of Florida. Alan is obsessively jealous of Josée's past, and half longs to be given occasion for present jealousy.

Suffocated by his needling love, and in the grip of extreme ennui, Josée obliges with a local boatman; but, after Alan has made the most of the incident, they find themselves back where they started. A chance encounter in New York with Bernard, the novelist with whom Josée had a brief affaire in the previous book, precipitates a sudden flight to Paris. Alan follows, finds her, and the same pattern is repeated with variations.

PUT this time, to make sure that the destruction of their relationship is complete, Josée describes to Alan, in precise physical terms, every last detail of her latest fornication. Alan looks at her for the first time with hatred, and Josée "listened to a great emptiness scattling within her." Emptiness is in the literary air;

there is probably a relationship between Mlle Sagan's ennui and Signor Moravia's la noia, but I suspect that the Italian novelist's emptiness has more relevance than Mile Sagan's to the individual's problem of "living in the world." As far as I can see, hers has none, yet it is the thing which most attracts readers to her work: that yearning for "les nuages qui passent . . . là bas . . . là bas . . . didn't, like his hero, sail in the les merveilleux nuages! "-the Hood. This is a zestful, truthful imprecise dreamy mirage which is book: at its own unpretentious always just out of reach-produces a feeling of euphoric nostalgia which is, I admit, woozily

That Scott Fitzgeraldish combination of riches and aimlessness. febrile gaiety and overwhelming sadness, is a powerful magic. But it is a nostalgia for nothing: these people, with their enviable freedom of action, are essentially solipsists: that there is a world outside their private stewpots, a world which at any moment may make their agonisings irrelevant, they do not know. Don't mistake me: I'm not

saying that novels today must have social content, or be "com- out either inducing undesirable mitted," or any of that jazz. Only neuroses or exposing society to that the emptiness which yawns, darkly attractive, in Mlle Sagan's characters is a dead and dreadful thing, turned inwards wholly, never admitting its own consequences to others. And so there is this sense of revelling in something which is essentially bad. Oh yes, she writes, as they say, like economical, with a wonderful talent for evocative physical description. But I cannot pretend that her novels leave me feeling anything but depressed and irri-

"The Day of the Tortolse" is what Thomas Mann would have called a Novellen-about 25.000 words long. But whereas Mann's approach even to a short short-story was that of a novelist, carefully designing the building in which he will later discover a time-bomb, Mr. Bates's, even in a novel, is that of a short-story writer, brushing in the outlines of his flimsy house and then suddenly whipping open an unsuspected

In this book, I think, he has hit his length precisely. There is no waste matter in this fragile little story of a middle-aged bachelor whose life as a domestic servant to his three imperious and quite dotty sisters is suddenly and briefly illuminated by the irrepressible gaiety of 'a pregnant. waif. It does just what it sets out to do-not much, certainly, but enough to raise it above magazine level; and it is unfailingly readable. The fact that one is never for a moment tempted to believe in any of the characters passes almost unnoticed.

inevitable echoes from "No Mean City" and "Love on the Dole," "The Clydesiders" is an and straightforward chronicle of family life in an

BRAIN TEASER

Set by E. B. Clarke

N one of June's birthdays her I father telephoned some of her friends inviting them to June's party. He noticed that Joan's telephone number consisted of the four digits in his own, but in reverse order, and that none phone number divided by the other gave June's age.

On a subsequent birthday June rang up Jennifer from a call box and she also noticed that Jennifer's number and that of the call box were four digit numbers, each the reverse of the other. Dividing these two numbers gave June's latest age.

How old was June when the two phone calls were made?

Entries should be addressed to Brain-Teaser No. 36, THE SUNDAY Times, 196, Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1, to arrive not later than first post on Friday, December 1. The first correct solution opened wins a £3 prize.

Solution to last Sunday's Problem

(i) 60; (ii) 255 yards. The £3 prize goes to: Mrs. A. G. Touch, Addlestone, Surrey.

THE TRAITORS

by William Foster

TREASON IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. By Margret Boveri. Translated by Jonathan Steinberg. (Macdonald. 35s.)

bout Pierre Laval as a schoolip as a Government Minister or on the gallows. Practically all the traitors

who come under Dr. Boveri's nicroscope emerge as intelli-

depressing reading. There are England and resistance only when between Scots Presbyterians and endid glimpses of an egocentric she was hallway across the etain plotting quietly away in Channel. the extent of allowing the hero's

TALFWAY through this a make-believe world of his own, massive book on the the American poet Ezra Pound broadcaster Tokyo Rose gaily actually voices crying in the wilderness, precursors of a great bend in the flow of history."

> Comes dangerously near whiteup outside Buckingham Palace Dr. Boveri to reveal that the

COPITA is the glass from hat. It is really rather catty of | country. But if you would like

November Best-Sellers...

- 1. Living Free. By Joy Adamson. (Collins. 25s.) 2. The Whispering Land. By Gerald Durrell. (Hart-Davis. 18s.) 3. Unconditional Surrender. By Evelyn Waugh. (Chapman & Hall. 18s.)
- 4. The Road Past Mandalay. By John Masters. (Michael Joseph. 21s.)
- 5. The Pale Horse. By Agatha Christie. (Collins. 15s.) 6. The Heart of the Hunter. By Laurens van der Post. (Hogarth Press. 21s.)
- 7. I Met a Lady. By Howard Spring. (Collins. 18s.) 8. A Civil Contract. By Georgette Heyer. (Heinemann, 16s.) Information supplied to The Sunday Times by the Army & Navy Stores, Bumpus, Foules, Harrods, Hatchards, Selfridges, W. H. Smith and The Times Bookshop in London; and by A. Brown & Sons, Hull; Douglas Edinburgh; George's Bookshop, Bristol; Hudson's Bookshops, Birmingham; George Over, Rugby; Philip, Son & Nephew, Liverpool, and

... and a few other suggestions

- Elizabeth and Leicester. By Elizabeth Jenkins. (Gollancz.
- Fokine: Memoirs of a Ballet Master. (Constable. 42s.) Chocolates For My Wife. By Todd Matshikiza. (Hodder & Stoughton, 12s. 6d.)
- The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie. By Muriel Spark. (Macmillan. The Empty Canvas. By Alberto Moravia. (Secker & Warburg.



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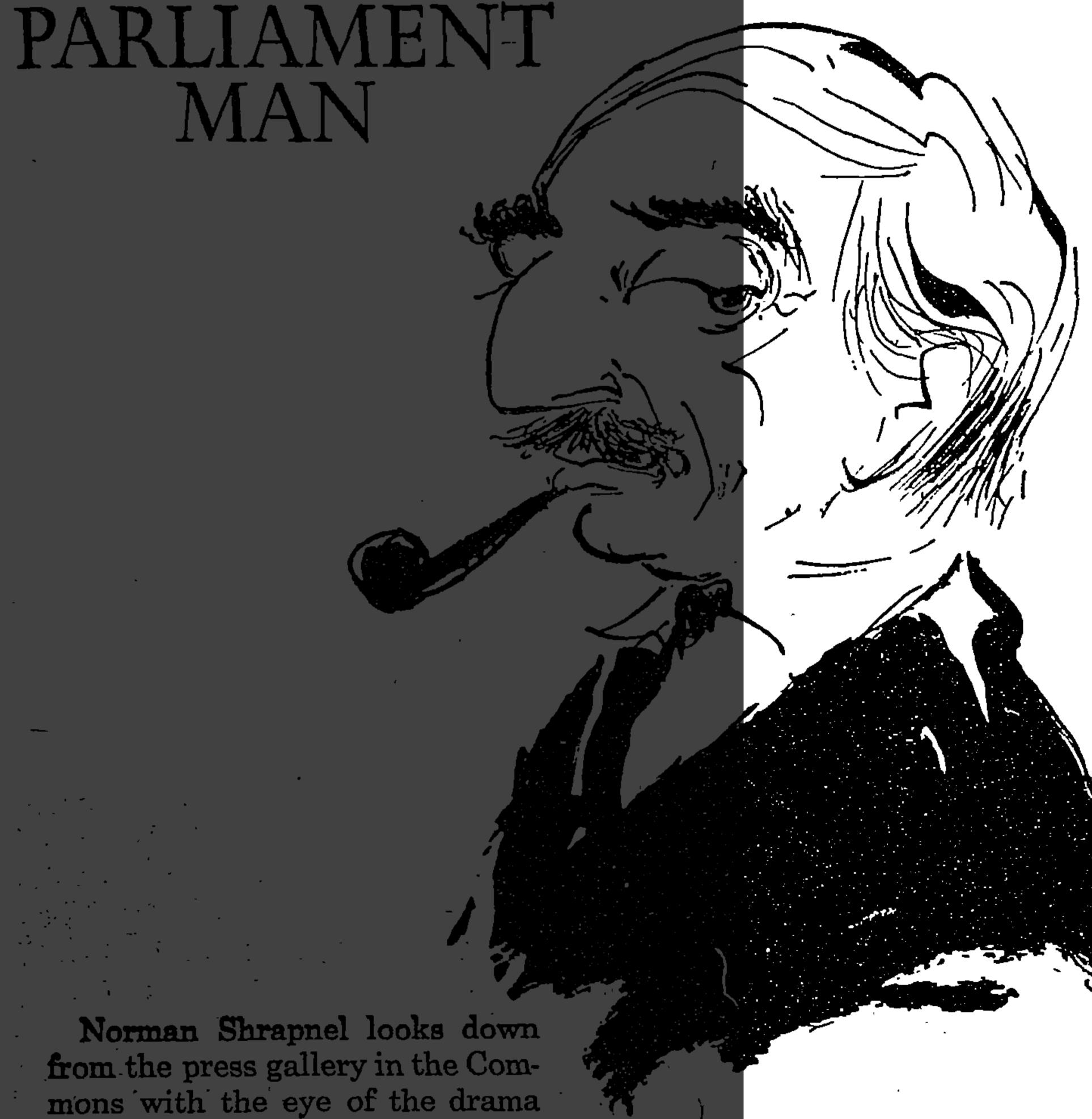
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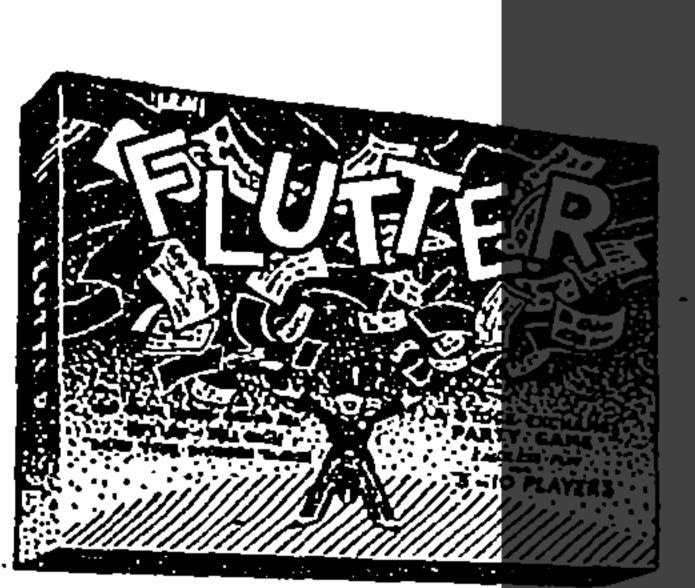
critic he used to be (and still when alarm, when relief. He has occasionally is). He sees a dramatic learnt to sense the emotion behind performance in which, as in classic the deadpan ministerial utterance, al Greece, the main action is trans- the serious purpose concealed in acted off-stage: where, as in the the seemingly flippant rejoinder. later Russian manner, much of If The Guardian reader finds it what is most important remains easier than most people to read unspoken...

for that unseen action, an ear this subtle observer for guide. cocked for those unspoken words. Giving praise where praise is due, He has learnt, too, to interpret the thumbing his nose where this is the ritual gestures – to distinguish, only appropriate gesture. Norman for instance, between the 57 var- Shrapnel is perhaps the liveliest ieties of what Hansard dryly notes and most discerning critic of the as (interruption); he knows when it farce, the tragedy, the melodrama signifies approval, when derision, that is parliament.

between the lines of the printed Shrapnel has a discerning eye reports, it is largely because he has

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Funto

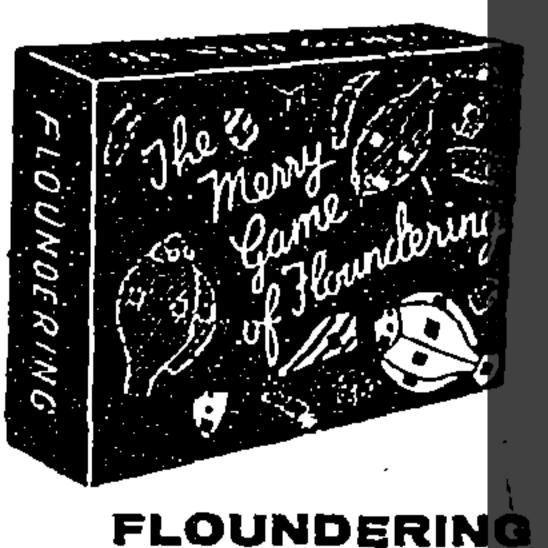


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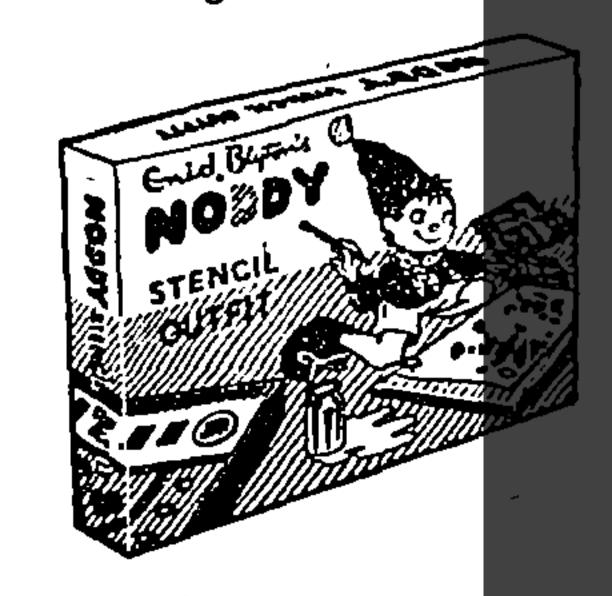


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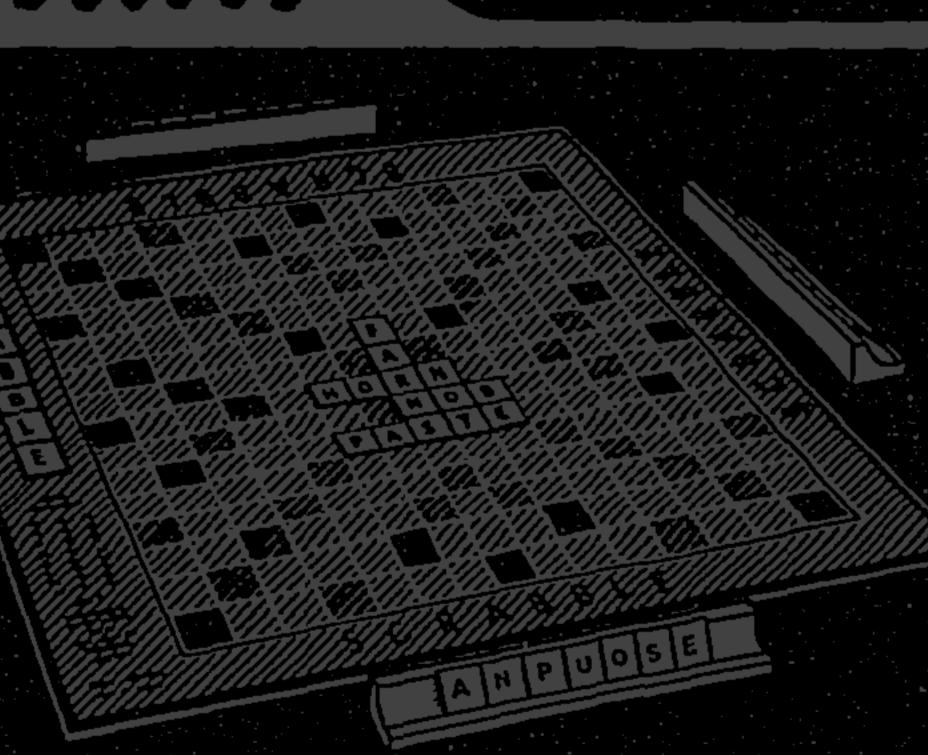


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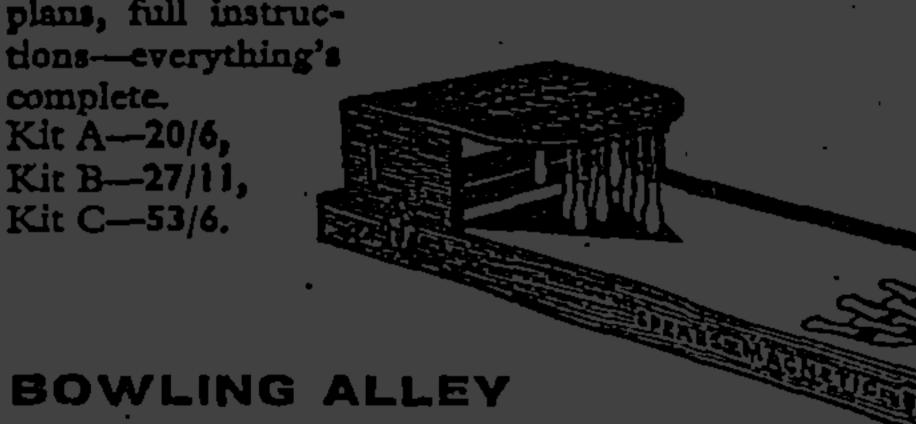
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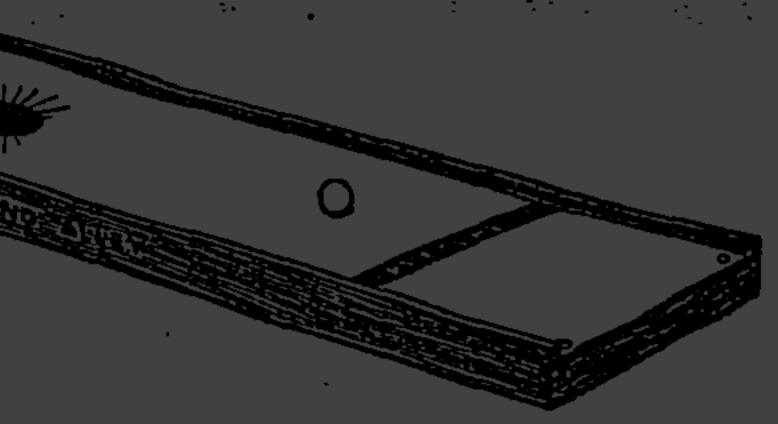
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